

Critique of Mao Tse-tung by R.D. (News and Letters Jan 1962),

being more factual and cautionary than analytical.

a. This is a highly tricky point. Mao's opposition to Li Li-san was based on the fact that there was virtually no urban proletariat proper - nor had there ever been much in almost non-industrialized China - and that guerilla warfare in mountains with at least nominal dominance of peasantry was only possible road to success. Also Comintern control was strong in the cities and there is strong, through a strongly disputed (Wittfogel) evidence that Mao was not happy under Comintern direction. The Kuomintang alliance had not been a happy one, and had been ordered by Stalin and Comintern.

Li Li-san was not "destroyed" unless you mean in some technical party sense. He was dismissed and sent to Moscow, returned with Red Army in Manchuria and became senior party official.

The Kiangsi Soviet was never "liquidated". It passed into the Juichin Republic. There was a purge mainly of dissident army and party men who apparently thought Mao too moderate; about 200 were probably killed. This still did not put Mao in absolute power. The fall of Li Li-san was in fact caused by the Comintern who decided to make Li the scapegoat and the so-called "returned students" under the direction of Comintern agent Pavel Mif continued to dominate the Party.

b. Again, what of peasants? And was there a working class if by this you mean urban proletariat. Most trained union leaders etc were killed by Chiang Kai-shek in 1927. And could the party have possibly held together under Chiang's intense police operations?

c. Because now there are cities and workers to be used.

d. Ch'en Tu-hsiu.

e. This is a dangerous statement. If you mean Mao has completely

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absorbed Confucian tenets of class structure and paternalist central control, then there are admittedly parallels but there are also immense divergencies. If you mean he has absorbed philosophical premises, that may be all right, for the yin-yang theory is really development and constant regeneration through disparate but complementary forces, not opposites. It seems more however as if you just use Confucian in the sense that most Westerners use it, i.e. to mean Chinese; and in this case further difficulties arise for it is certain that other Chinese intellectuals and communists and revolutionaries were equally tied to their nation's traditions.

f. This kind of sweeping attack smacks of HUAC. Surely all bourgeois historians of China are not Stalinists.

g. This I think is unfair. They were genuinely excited by what they thought was an emergent new and dynamic form of Chinese society, in which the peasants and workers they met stood for the first time on their own two feet with dignity, where they met honesty, courtesy and warmth. For a time I even had you thinking that there was real revolutionary fervour in Yenan, and though we have both modified our opinions, I still think this period must have brought a profound liberation to millions, even if it was only temporary.

57 Morgan Avenue, East Haven, Conn. Feb 6.

Dear Raya, thanks for sending me this so fast. I delayed replying because I had thought that I might try a general critique, but energy tailed off and I just enclose a few desultory remarks that will probably tell you more about my state of mind than help you with your work. This is a terribly difficult subject and you handle it with the confidence your interpretation, which is more consistent than any other I know of as an analysis of the state capitalist developments inherent in what press and administration and almost every one else insist on calling Marxism-Leninism, gives to you.

But I am puzzled by the overall result, which leads you to see Mao at all times as a Stalinist, implacable and tyrannical, and does not allow for development or retrogression in his thought or his personality. The result is that you end up with a monolithic interpretation - this not meant in a derogatory sense - which in fact is not unlike that of Wittfogel, the Wittfogel of the polemic in China Quarterly against Schwartz (rather than the W. of Oriental Despotism), where he sees those who suggest a deviant trait in Chinese Communism or, let's use the word, Maocism, as virtual traitors in that they undermine our solidarity against a monolithic anti-Christ bloc. By this of course I do not impute any intellectual or personal coincidence between you and W. I admire you too much for that, but rather a certain similarity in manner in the case of this article. This saddened me a little because what you are so brilliantly qualified to do is to blend the intellectual with the personal, to analyze with precision and to show the role of the working man who is having his life destroyed before his eyes, to

only shared with despot

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to show his anguish and the reasons for it in terms understandable to him and his fellows, and to suggest the solution. You do have here the quotes from the Hundred Flowers book but what of the earlier revolution - or was there never one? How much volition and how much inexorable compulsion was there in the course that followed. Was the Hunan report hypocritical, just what Stalin wanted (Wittfogel at his silliest) or did it represent a belief that had to be abandoned?

This is muddled and may anger you. I don't want it to. What I am trying to say is that I see this revolution as a humanist, which I am, and if I see it as a Marxist-humanist (to which my claim is more tenuous), I suppose I see it in a different way. Perhaps simply in a more sentimental way, since I lack your intellectual discipline.

With these reservations and the ones overleaf, I acknowledge this article as a fine and original attempt at synthesis, and am happy to have been of a little help. If you put an acknowledgement in the book please leave out the bit on my knowledge of Chinese, since I didn't use it in my reading, and the phrase suggests that I barrowed through Chinese sources when I didn't.

What news from England?

Sincerely,

Jonathan

Please send me a couple more copies to replace the one I return. Air mail will do. What is a policeman?

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February 9, 1962

Dear Jonathan:

The characteristic element of your critique of the supplement on Mao brings us all over again to what is "subjective" and what is "objective." Bourgeois academicians think that by relying only on the objective, the Marxist is blind to the question of will, personality, the accidental, the "human" and therefore never really tells the whole story. Hegel, who was no Marxist not only because he lived before Marx but because he was a "happy" bourgeois who lived in his philosophic tower of ideas, saw through any such superficial analysis. Without having any recourse to "the underlying economics", and truly believing in the ideal in its purest thought sense, he nevertheless saw through it all even as he saw through his own individual happiness to the negativity and imperfections and even horrors of the actual because the whole was so pervading a concept in both history, actuality and thought that he abolished division between objective and subjective not by "erasing" it as if it were some chalk on a blackboard but by "absorbing" both into an Absolute where the unifying element predominated over the dissident one.

Take, for example, the question of will. Nothing appears to be more subjective than a man's will. It is, philosophically, what divided Kant from Hegel and the latter ~~never~~ never had more fun than when he hammered away against Kant's "oughts" --if only were as it "ought" to be, we not only would be erasing centuries of history of what is, but could substitute the moral of men of good will changing it all, bending it to "the general will" and we'd be living happily ever after -- except that there would be no movement, no forward movement of humanity.

This, however, didn't mean that Hegel thereby threw "will" overboard. Quite the contrary! He showed the contradiction within it, which didn't come from the moral "ought", but from self-development, development through contradiction, etc. The two most important historic leaps in this, said Hegel, is when will recognizes necessity and doesn't allow himself to be capricious: "the want of freedom springs from clinging tenaciously to an antithesis, and from looking at what is, and what happens, as contradictory to what ought to be and to happen..... man is the architect of his own fortune...If men remembered, on the contrary, that what happens to them was an evolution of themselves.....So long as a man is otherwise conscious that what he is free, his harmony of soul, and peace of mind will not be disturbed by disagreeable events. It is their view of necessity, therefore, which is at the root of the content and discontent of men, and which in that way determined their destiny itself." (Encyclopedia, par.148)

If that were so --and it isn't with Mao --than the will "purified of all that interferes with its universalism" (Philosophy of Mind, par.) would find no contradiction between itself and freedom for all. But when discussion is "exoteric" and hence "the only method available in dealing with the external apprehension of notions as mere facts, by which notions are perverted into their opposite." (par.573)

Dear Jonathan, you seem to think that this contradiction between freedom for all and freedom only for Mao and tyranny for all must be modified according to whether Mao did something really out of "volition" or there was "inexorable compulsion" as if the "inexorable compulsion" wasn't the very one that produced the will such as it was in life with its inevitable results--Maoism.

If I may, I'd like to say that you are too subjective also in your concept of Stalinism just because the debates in the academic world have in front of them Mao or Stalin or whatever the personality and being or not being a "Stalinist" then depends on whether one follow that person called Stalin. But Stalin was a name, only a name, for an objective world phenomenon, that of state-capitalism. That, and that alone explains, how Mao could disregard every rule in the book of Stalin as the Russian phenomenon, and still be a "Stalinist"--but I never call him that because he then is a Maoist and yet that full state-capitalist phenomenon. Please reread the section on the "Defeat of

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did not become the great divide between Maoism and Stalinism as, in World War I, self-development did become the divide between established Marxism, and Leninism.

There is no reason to be so self-conscious either on the question of whether what you call "monolithic interpretation" begins to sound as if it were Wittfogel. Only when one disregards the truths--and millions in forced labor is dismissed because it is supposed to be "order" as against the anarchy before and therefore somehow "deserving" of ~~xxx~~ a whitewash of Maoism as against State Department persecution and misinterpretation--the whole truth, that one has any need for shoddy self-defense. No one on earth, from Wittfogel to the Schwartz wing of the controversy--both fully State Department--nor from a Mrs. Wright to an outright Communist (whether Stalinist, Maoist, Khrushchevite, or Titoist) would possibly wish to associate with my integral interpretation. And, while I wouldn't land an academic or a State Department or Stalinist chair, I would, I hope, make the young humanist student wish to start on new, totally new foundations. And that was my only disappointment* in your critique, that it ~~xxx~~ did not take its point of departure from the analysis in the supplement, but on the basis of what your points of departure had been previously.

Now as to the concrete, factual points: (a) I know Li Li-san was not physically destroyed, but returned to the fold later; I thought that my quotation from Snow which referred to "rebels" and not to individuals made that clear. But obviously it didn't and I'll make sure to expand that point so it is clear when next I expand it for book. (b) At that point the physical divorce from the city is dealt with not as if it could have been avoided in face of Chiang Kai-shek's triumphant counter-revolution, but only as a matter of fact. The sharp division between a genuine Marxist and a Maoist there is that a Marxist would have told the truth, as Lenin said it when he had to retreat to the NEP, instead of making the defeat into the basis of theory, as both Stalin did with "socialism in one country" and Mao with "the peasant Army." (c) Because of the above the present critics and workers are what you say exactly "to be used", not to become the basis of full freedom. (d) Sorry about the wrong spelling on Chen Tu-hsiu. There is quite a difference in English translation in the 1920's (where I took it, I believe) and the more knowledgeable present. (e) I cannot see how that could have been misunderstood as meaning anything but what I quote Confucianism to mean in Mao "complementary in place of "contradictory" in the view of opposites. (f) and (g) Sorry to see that you were more anxious to defend the liberal writers and their genuine enthusiasm during Yanan than the new that I am stressing over and over again in dealing with the economic compulsions of state-capitalism, the typically Maoist "thought reform", the famine and tyranny that now exist. Of course, there is the opposite --and not only in ~~what~~ the 100 flowers campaigns revealed (the real revolution of 1925-27 forms no part of this particle since I begin with Mao and Mao begins with the end, the defeat of 1925-7, up through the present "communes") but what is sure to come in the future. That is why I'm showing the indications for the future, not merely the future of my book as I say in article, but future of actual developments in China and the world. Therefore what I really would greatly appreciate from you is comment on that very last section, "Subjectivity", and tell me, above all, how it is, would, or may affect your own study of China.

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